

**Commissioner's Weekly Field Memo**  
**Friday, October 24, 2014**

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## **Notes from Commissioner Gist**

### **1. Crisis-management support services available to schools in the event of threat to school safety or threatening incident**

In last week's field memo I noted to you that we are working closely with other state agencies to provide you with information and support as need regarding threats to school safety. As we try to make sense of the renewed threats against schoolchildren in three of our communities, our partner agencies have reached out to let us know that they are prepared to provide you with crisis-management support through an interagency team. To explain this resource further, Jamia McDonald, the executive director of the Emergency Management Agency, and Craig Stenning, the director of the Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals, have sent us this communication to share with all LEAs:

In light of recent threats that have been sent to some area schools, the Rhode Island Emergency Management Agency (RIEMA) along with the Rhode Island Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals (BHDDH) would like to make you aware of crisis management support services that can be provided to your school districts if the situation and need were to arise.

Members of the Rhode Island Disaster Behavioral Health Response Team (DBHRT) can be deployed to your district to help support response efforts in the event behavioral health services are needed. After an incident, teachers, staff, administrators, students, and their families may feel overwhelmed and vulnerable. The DBHRT is a trained team

of volunteers who can be deployed to provide post-disaster behavioral health services statewide. The goal of the DBHRT is to provide an organized response to individual victims, family members, volunteers, responders, survivors, or the community impacted by critical incidents or disasters. DBHRT's mission is to support those affected by an incident from the initial response through the transition to recovery.

The DBHRT provides interventions in three distinct phases that may be delivered at a school, in an affected community, or statewide. The phases and interventions include:

#### *Immediate Response*

- Behavioral Health Needs Assessment
- Psychological First Aid
- Crisis Incident Stress Management
- Community Outreach
- Public Information
- Behavioral Health Consultation

#### *Transition to Recovery*

- Brief Supportive Counseling
- Information Dissemination
- Screening and Referral
- Support Groups
- Public Education

#### *Preparedness and Mitigation*

- Disaster Behavioral Health Planning and Networking
- Prevention Services Designed to Strengthen Community Resiliency
- Specialized Training Initiatives for Team Members and Community Partners

For more information about the role these teams can play in assisting your district, please contact Susan Earley, Rhode Island Disaster Behavioral Health Coordinator, either by e-mail, at [susan.earley@bhddh.ri.gov](mailto:susan.earley@bhddh.ri.gov), or by phone, at 265-3492.

## **2. RIDE to release 2<sup>nd</sup> annual report on educator evaluations**

We have completed our second annual report on educator evaluations, “Improving Teaching and Learning: Year 2.” This report is based on information from the 2013-14 school year, the second year of full implementation of educator evaluations in Rhode Island. We plan to post the report on our website and to release the report to the public next week, possibly on Tuesday. The report includes a summary of the responses to our mid-year survey of teachers and building administrators regarding evaluations, as well as aggregate numbers statewide on summative ratings and on the various components of our five approved evaluation systems. The report includes no data or information at the school level, and of course results of individual educator’s evaluations remain confidential under state law.

As I note in a cover letter in the report, the purpose of educator evaluations is not simply to gain a high rating, and the purpose is certainly not to compare one school against others. The purpose, as this report notes, is to “encourage student-focused

conversations that can help educators make improvements in real time.” Those who receive a rating of highly effective should continue to examine all facets of their teaching, so as to continue to improve and to help others do so as well. Although some teachers will not receive formal evaluations during this school year, informal observations and conversations about improving instruction and advancing student achievement should be vigorous, thoughtful, and on-going.

**3. *Reminder: RIDE seeks Presidential Scholar nominees by November 12 – Action Item***

The Commission on Presidential Scholars, of the U.S. Department of Education, has asked me to nominate students from Rhode Island as 2015 U.S. Presidential Scholars. I am seeking your help in selecting the best possible nominees from Rhode Island.

The Presidential Scholars Program honors outstanding high-school seniors who are selected on the basis of either outstanding scholarship (based on SAT or ACT scores) or accomplishment in the arts or creative writing. In order to expand the nominee pool, the Commission has asked me to nominate additional candidates, “students who, while demonstrating outstanding scholarship, might not otherwise be nominated through the current SAT/ACT or arts-recognition processes.”

To help me select these additional Rhode Island nominees, I ask you to nominate one male and one female high-school senior (who are citizens or legal permanent residents of the U.S., graduating between January and June of 2015) from each high school in your LEA. In selecting U.S. Presidential Scholars from among the nominees, the Commission will consider:

- involvement and service, in school and community;
- leadership and character;
- writing samples;
- academic achievements; and
- extraordinary achievement, heavy work load, family responsibilities, or obstacles overcome.

Each student you nominate should prepare an application that includes:

- his or her resume, including home mailing address;
- a letter of reference from you or a school official that explains how the student stands out as having outstanding scholarship; and
- a brief (approximately 500 to 750 words) essay that responds to this question: “What special challenges or hurdles have you overcome while still achieving high academic success?”

Either you or your high-school principal(s) will be our contact in this process. I would ask either you or your principals (not the nominated students) to submit your nominations to Dana Wilson ([dana.wilson@ride.ri.gov](mailto:dana.wilson@ride.ri.gov)) by November 12.

From nominations we receive, I will select up to ten nominees from Rhode Island (up to five male students, five female students).

The Commission will select finalists by mid-January 2015, and Scholars will be announced at the beginning of May. Scholars will receive an expense-paid trip to Washington, D.C., in June. For more information about the program, see:

<http://www2.ed.gov/programs/psp/index.html>

## From RIDE

### ***Educator Recognition:***

#### **4. Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching nominations open**

The Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching (PAEMST) is the highest honor the United States government bestows for K–12 mathematics and science teaching. Up to 108 teachers may be recognized each year. Presidential awardees receive a certificate signed by the President, a trip for two to Washington, D.C., to attend a series of recognition events, and a \$10,000 award from the National Science Foundation (NSF). The most recent cohort of awardees even had the opportunity to [meet with President Barack Obama](#).

The PAEMST program is pleased to announce that the 2014–15 nomination period for grades 7–12 mathematics and science (including computer science) teachers is now open. Please consider nominating a talented teacher using the [PAEMST website](https://www.paemst.org/) [<https://www.paemst.org/>]. The nomination deadline is **April 1, 2015**, and the application deadline is May 1, 2015.

If you have questions or if you need more information this award, contact Peter McLaren, at [peter.mclaren@ride.ri.gov](mailto:peter.mclaren@ride.ri.gov) or 222-8454.



***Legal:***

**5. Student found eligible for admission to career-technical program**

Student found to be eligible for admission into career and technical (CTC) program at the East Providence CTC despite fact that scheduling him for career-preparation coursework this year will require deferral of some academic courses he previously failed, and must pass, in order to meet graduation requirements:

<http://www2.ride.ri.gov/applications/RideDirectory/DOCS/2014/013-14%20Student%20S.%20Doe%20v.%20East%20Providence%209-2014.pdf>

**From the U.S. Department of Education**

**6. U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights issues guidance regarding bullying of students with disabilities**

As part of National Bullying Prevention Awareness Month, the U.S. Education Department Office for Civil Rights has issued [guidance to schools](#) reminding them that bullying is wrong and must not be tolerated—including against America’s 6.5 million students with disabilities.

The U.S. Department of Education issued guidance in the form of a letter to educators detailing public schools’ responsibilities under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and Title II of Americans with Disabilities Act regarding the bullying of students with disabilities. If a student with a disability is being bullied, federal law requires schools to take immediate and appropriate

action to investigate the issue and, as necessary, take steps to stop the bullying and prevent it from recurring.

“While there is broad consensus that bullying cannot be tolerated, the sad reality is that bullying persists in our schools today, especially for students with disabilities,” said Catherine E. Lhamon, Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights. “Basic decency and respect demand that our schools ensure that all their students learn in a safe environment. I look forward to continuing our work with schools to address and reduce incidents of bullying so that no student is limited in his or her ability to participate in and benefit from all that our educational programs have to offer.”

Since 2009, the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) has received more than 2,000 complaints regarding the bullying of students with disabilities in the nation’s public elementary and secondary schools.

This new guidance builds upon anti-bullying guidance the U. S. Department of Education has issued in recent years concerning schools’ legal obligations to fix the problem, including:

- a [2013 dear colleague letter](#) and [enclosure](#) by the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) clarifying that when bullying of a student with a disability results in the student not receiving meaningful educational benefit under IDEA, the school must remedy the problem, regardless of whether the bullying was based on the student's disability;
- a [2010 dear colleague letter](#) by the OCR, which elaborated on potential violations when bullying and harassment is based on race, color, national origin, sex, or disability; and
- a [2000 dear colleague letter](#) by the OCR and OSERS, which explained that bullying based on disability may violate civil

rights laws enforced by OCR as well as interfere with a student's receipt of special education under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

The latest letter makes clear that the protections for students with disabilities who are bullied on any basis extend to the roughly three-quarters-of-a-million students who are not eligible for IDEA services but are entitled to services under the broader Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. That law bars discrimination on the basis of disability in all programs or activities that receive federal financial assistance.

Help is available for those who are either targets of disability bullying or know of someone who might be, such as:

- a [fact sheet for parents](#) on schools' obligations under federal law to address bullying. The fact sheet is also available in [Spanish](#);
- visiting the federal website, [www.stopbullying.gov](http://www.stopbullying.gov), which provides useful information on bullying prevention and remedies;
- asking to meet with the student's team that designs his or her individualized education program—the IEP or Section 504 teams;
- asking to meet with the principal or school district's special education coordinators to have the school address bullying concerns; and
- seeking help from OCR. The office investigates complaints of disability discrimination at schools. To learn more about federal civil rights laws or how to file a complaint, contact OCR at (800) 421-3481 (TDD: 800-877-8339), or [ocr@ed.gov](mailto:ocr@ed.gov). OCR's website is [www.ed.gov/ocr](http://www.ed.gov/ocr). To fill out a complaint form online, go to:

<http://www.ed.gov/ocr/complaintintro.html>.

To view OCR's guidance detailing public schools responsibilities regarding the bullying of students with disabilities in Spanish, [click here](#).

## **7. U.S. Department of Education posts one-page profiles of Blue Ribbon Schools**

The U.S. Department of Education has posted on its website one-page profiles of each of the 2014 National Blue Ribbon Schools, including the three from Rhode Island: [Barrington Middle School](#); [Fort Barton School](#), in Tiverton; and [Stephen Olney School](#), in North Providence.

## **From other state offices and agencies**

## **8. Health Department provides Ebola update**

Please see this update from the Department of Health:

To date, no one has become infected with Ebola within the state of Rhode Island. Since August, the Rhode Island Department of Health (HEALTH) Division of Infectious Disease & Epidemiology has investigated a number of healthcare providers' reports of possible Ebola cases, and through consultation with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), screening, and testing, HEALTH has ruled out all patients as cases.

In Rhode Island, only people who have been in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone in the past three weeks are at risk of developing Ebola. Even if someone has relatives in Guinea, Liberia, or Sierra Leone, they are *not* at risk for developing Ebola if they have not traveled to one of these countries in the past three weeks. The Ebola outbreaks in Senegal and Nigeria are now considered over.

There is [specific guidance](#) available for people coming here from Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone about monitoring their temperatures.

People are not contagious until they show symptoms.  
You *cannot* get Ebola through:

- casual contact with someone who has no symptoms of the disease;
- air;
- water; or
- food in the United States.

The Ebola outbreak is an evolving process. Healthcare workers, the CDC, and others are learning how best to respond. We are expanding our response to meet the needs. There will be changes and adjustments as we go.

To contact HEALTH regarding Ebola, call 222-8022.

## **9. Schools encouraged to participate in national mock election Thursday**

Please see this letter from Secretary of State A. Ralph Mollis:

I am writing to ask for your help in encouraging schools in your district to participate in the 2014 National Student/Parent Mock Election. The purpose of the mock election is to educate students and parents about the duties of citizenship and to inspire them to exercise their right to vote. By helping to build an informed electorate, we can indeed strengthen our democracy.

As the Secretary of State, and a parent, I have personally observed the self-esteem and life skills the program builds. They are invaluable no matter what career the student follows.

The 2014 National Student/Parent Mock Election will take place on **Thursday** (October 30). The mock ballot will include candidates for United States Senate and the United States House of Representatives, as well as key national topics and social issues.

If you are unable to coordinate the voting in your school, please ask teacher or another administrator to return the enrollment form. The enrollment form, ballot and additional resources are available at [www.nationalmockelection.com](http://www.nationalmockelection.com). I invite every Rhode Island student, their teachers, and their parents to participate in the 2014 National Student/Parent Mock Elections. If you have any questions about this program, you can visit [www.nationalmockelection.com](http://www.nationalmockelection.com).

I appreciate your efforts in encouraging the schools in your district to participate in the national mock election activities to help our students develop an interest in sustaining the vitality of our democracy.

**10. RIHEAA offers free workshops on WaytogoRI**

Please see this message from the R.I. Higher Education Assistance Authority:

The R.I. Higher Education Assistance Authority (RIHEAA) is excited to announce that enhancements have been made to the Individual Learning Plan (ILP) on WaytogoRI. You are invited to attend a free half-day workshop any day during the week of November 17 to learn about the new features, including resources to start using the customized ILP at your school. You may register for any half-day session or both half-day sessions offered on the same day or, if you prefer, half-day sessions offered on different days. All workshops will take place at the Alan Shawn Feinstein Middle School, 15 Foster Drive, Coventry.

The details and the registration form are available on the [RIHEAA website](#). Send the completed registration form to: [lshevlin@riheaa.org](mailto:lshevlin@riheaa.org).

If you have questions about these workshops, please contact Lisa Shevlin ([lshevlin@riheaa.org](mailto:lshevlin@riheaa.org)).

**From other organizations**

**11. RIASCD to hold session on technology in the classroom, with Rhode Island Teacher of the Year David Moscarelli**

Please see this message from RIASCD:

RIASCD invites you to participate in an evening with the Rhode Island Teacher of the Year: “Responding to New Technology in the Classroom: Selecting and Using Technology to Engage Students,” on Wednesday, **November 12**, from 5 to 8 p.m., at the Radisson Airport Hotel. Cost is \$50 per person, for dinner and discussion plus membership in the association.

RIASCD is pleased to honor David Moscarelli, Rhode Island Teacher of the Year, and to provide an opportunity for our dinner guests to interact with him. David is a science teacher, the digital-portfolio coordinator, and the technology-integration coordinator at Ponaganset High School, and during this event David will discuss how educators can respond to the large and ever-increasing number of new education technology tools that are available today. This will be a relaxed and interactive conversation with dinner. Please register at [www.riascd.org](http://www.riascd.org).

## **12. Apeiron Institute to hold Sustainable Schools Summit**

Please see this notice from the Apeiron Institute for Sustainable Living:

The Apeiron Institute for Sustainable Living will hold its 2014 Sustainable Schools Summit on **November 7**, from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., at Rhode Island College. This year’s summit will include inspiring speakers (soon to be announced), 16 workshops, art and performances, and an afternoon of action groups – small gatherings for participants to expand discussions, hatch new plans, collaborate, network, and strategize. The day concludes with a celebration and



reception with performances that reflect back the events of the day – don't miss it! [Register now](#) – it's pay-as-you-wish!

### **13. TNTP seeks applicants for Fishman Prize for superlative teaching**

Please see this notice from TNTP:

Every year, we get to spend the summer with some mind-blowingly good teachers: the winners of TNTP's annual [\\$25,000 Fishman Prize for Superlative Classroom Practice](#). It's the only national award exclusively for teachers in high-poverty public schools.

Even more than the big check, the summer residency exemplifies what the Fishman Prize is all about: giving top teachers the opportunity to reflect on their craft, strengthen their voice, and shape their profession. And they emerge having created something tangible: a collection of essays about their work in the classroom.

Today, we're thrilled to publish the 2014 Fishman Prize winners' essays, [Languages for Learning](#). In the essays, you'll hear how "deep discipline" helps students who have never touched an instrument become championship band members. You'll see what "getting to know your students" *really* means, in an AP Calculus classroom. You'll hear why learning physics starts with talking like a 10-year-old. And you'll learn what Hiroshima has to do with teaching fourth-grade English language learners in Oakland.

We're also excited to open applications and nominations for the 2015 Fishman Prize. Now we're looking for the next set

of winners - and that's where you come in. Last year, we received thousands of nominations and over 820 applications from teachers nationwide. Take a few seconds right now and start an application. Or tell a great teacher how much they matter with a nomination. The winners aren't the only ones who benefit. Nominators get a chance to recognize teachers who deserve more attention. Applicants get a chance to reflect on their teaching. And finalists receive \$1,000 each.

***RIDE will post this field memo on Tuesday, at:***

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/InsideRIDE/CommissionerDeborahAGist/FieldMemos.aspx>